NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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No. 535 NEW YORK, MARCH 30, 1907. Price, Five Cents

THE MAKING OF A KING

OR NICK CARTER FACES HIS GREATEST MYSTERY

BY THE AUTHOR OF NICK CARTER

The next thing he was conscious of was that the two doors at opposite sides of the room opened simultaneously, and men rushed in and threw rugs over his head till he was almost smothered.

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THE MAKING OF A KING;

OR,

Nick Carter Faces His Greatest Mystery.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEGINNING OF A MYSTERY.

There have been many strange tales of adventure written and told, but never was there one that was stranger, more incomprehensible and which tested the credulity more than the one to which Nick Carter listened, told to him by his friend, Gerald Starbuck.

Our own small world contains yet one country of infinite mystery; one country where the foot of the explorer has rarely trod; one locality concerning which our knowledge is based largely upon surmise; one region wherein the white-skinned man is unwelcome, and from which, if he succeeds in penetrating it, he rarely returns.

We refer to it vaguely; we think about it as surrounded by the unscalable heights of the Himalayas; we recognize it on the maps as Tibet and Nepal, and if we look sharply at the maps we will discover that in all that immense tract of land we see but one city of residences recorded.

We are told that Khatmandu has a population of fifty thousand; but the men who told us that only guessed at it; they did not know, and they do not know any more—or, at least, but little more—than you and I know about it.

The map tells us that the main range of the towering Himalayas lies between Nepal and Tibet; that the highest mountain in the world—Everest—is within stone's throw of Khatmandu, in Nepal—on the map; and we have been told, vaguely, that the country to the northward of Nepal is one mass of lofty mountains.

We are told a lot of things about the inhabitants of that mysterious region of the earth, but of all that is told to us we may accept very little of it as absolute truth, for mostly it is conjecture; or, at least, it is like the historical novel that is "based on fact" only.

All that we *know* about it is that in that country there is some sort of a civilization—a civilization that is not *our* civilization, but which, nevertheless, is so much older than our own as to put us back into the early stage of creation in comparison.

And so when the detective prepared himself to listen to the story of Gerald Starbuck, who had had a strange experience in this mysterious country, he was prepared also to accept it "with a grain of salt," as the saying is.

The two had set aside a particular Sunday for the relation of the tale. Starbuck had said to him:

"We must take at least an entire day for the story, Nick—a day which we will arrange beforehand must be passed without interruption. We will lock ourselves inside your study, which is the safest place I know. We will not unlock the door until I have finished my story."

The detective agreed to this, and Starbuck continued:

"You may think that because Idayah, my enemy, has momentarily disappeared, that she has abandoned her determination to take me back to that mysterious country where she lives; but she has not. She is thoroughly determined that I shall not relate this story to you, or to any living person. She will use all the power she sways to prevent my telling it, *and once it is told, the person who hears it will stand in the same danger that I stand in now.* Knowing that, do you still wish to hear it?"

Nick Carter shrugged his shoulders and laughed outright.

"We will fix Sunday for the hearing," he said, in reply.

"Very well, Nick. So be it. But promise me one thing."

"What is it?"

"That you will never censure me for the telling. I warn you that there will not be a moment in your life after you have heard it, from the day you hear it until the day of your death, when you will not be in momentary danger. The secrets of Idayah are—to them—holy secrets, sacred secrets. An alien may not know them, or knowing them, must become one of them, or—*must die!* Shall it be the story?"

"Yes."

"On Sunday?"

"Yes."

"Then, if you would hear it, and hear it to the end, do not let me be left one moment alone in the meantime; do not permit me to remain for a single minute unguarded. Remain in my presence—stay with me—yourself, if you can do so, until the story is told, *for I assure you now that in some hellish way Idayah knows now that I am to tell you the story, and will prevent it if she can.*"

Such was the preparation for the story, such the warning given by the man who knew—or who claimed that he knew; such the unwritten, unuttered threat which Starbuck knew existed, and of which he had already been made to feel the weight.

Then came the Sunday morning when the story was to be told.

Before the two men adjourned to Nick Carter's study to lock themselves inside and to remain there until the story should be told, the detective gave the following orders, to please Starbuck:

He directed that Chick should not leave the house at all during the day, or until Nick should give him permission to do so. Patsy and Ten-Ichi were also to remain inside the house, unless Chick gave them orders to the contrary, and Joseph was to remain on duty at the front door during the entire day, or until Nick and Starbuck issued from the study.

"There," said Nick laughingly, when at last he locked the door of the study on himself and Starbuck, "I have conformed to every suggestion you have made, Starbuck, so now I think you may feel free to tell me all of that wonderful story, without any dread or fear of interruption. I have agreed to every request of yours in order that nothing might interfere with your freedom of speech. There are cigars in plenty on the table; there are sandwiches over yonder, if you should get hungry. Now, are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Wait a moment, then. I want to begin this thing even, so to speak, and in order to do that I wish to make a short statement. After that you can tell your story."

"Well?"

"I have known you about twenty years, Starbuck; I have known you to be about as far removed from an imaginative person as any man I know; I have known you to be truthful; I know you to be an athlete, and I know a lot more things to your credit and nothing at all to your discredit."

"That is at least good of you to say all that, Carter."

"Oh, I'm not chucking bouquets at your head. I'm getting this story started right. To continue: Until after election, in the month of November last, the idea that you could be connected with or associated with anything that bordered upon the supernatural would have been farthest from my thoughts. Now, if I am rehashing something that we both know all about, bear in mind that I do it only in order to set us both straight, and so that we may start on equal terms."

"Go on. I see what you are at."

"I don't think you do—quite. Nevertheless, while my acquaintance with you, personally, began many years ago, my acquaintance with this affair began only eight weeks ago."

"Yes."

"At that time I wandered into the Garden one day during the Horse Show. While I was there a man was killed, seemingly by accident. He was known as Baron Sternfeldt. Later it developed that his death was not the result of accident, but that he was deliberately murdered—and not only was he murdered, but there had been two separate and distinct plots against his life, either of which would have succeeded, both of which did succeed, for he was struck by each of them at almost the same instant: and, in short, it might be said, that although there was only one victim in the case, it was nevertheless a double murder."*

*See No. 333 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "Facing An Unseen Terror."

"But what is the use in going over all this? We only waste time; and time is valuable when I have this story to tell. At any moment——"

"We won't be interrupted. I have guarded thoroughly against that, as I have told you. As for going over the ground, I do it—well, because I wish to do it."

"All right."

"In the effort that I made at the time to trace out the mystery and set it straight, I went to interview you in the little office you used in your capacity as one of the officials of the show. While we were seated together in that room, I with my back to the door, you suddenly began to stare at something that was behind me, implored me not to move, finally extorted a promise from me that I would not move or turn my head for fifteen minutes, and then you went out, saying you would return. You did not return; there was a mystery about your disappearance; and that same night I succeeded in trailing and overtaking you in Jersey City."

"What the dev——"

"Wait. I arrested a woman called Idayah—a woman who could change her disguise from her supposed personality to that of a man almost at will. When I found you, you were in some strange sort of mental condition, which cannot be better described than to make use of the rather vulgar expression, 'bughouse.'

"Keep still now; I'm almost through. We sent you away up the Hudson to your country home. Idayah was sent to jail and then to prison. You got better and returned to your rooms in the city, and sent me word that you were ready and willing to finish telling me the story you had begun to tell me in your office at the time you left me so strangely.

"The morning of the day I went to your rooms to see you was the morning after Idayah had made her escape from prison. I had only just received information of the fact. I went from my informant of her escape direct to your apartment, and only to find that you had been mysteriously spirited away from there. Your rooms were on the sixteenth floor of an eighteen-story building. You had been taken out through a window to the roof. Now, investigation developed the fact that this mysterious woman, whom we call Idayah, has outstripped the Wright brothers in the flying-machine business, and that she had used one of her machines to fly to the roof of the building where you lived and take you away. Later, she came here, to this house, the same night, presumably to take me away, too; but I fooled her in that, and also succeeded in rescuing you a second time from her clutches—if they are clutches."

"I found that you were mentally in the same condition then as you were that other time I rescued you; that is, you were very nearly approaching unreason. Until two days ago you were not able to tell me anything at all, and it follows that I am as much in the dark about the so-called mysteries of this case as I ever was. I have put you off until to-day to tell your story in order that you might assuredly be in your right mind to tell it. I know now that you are, and I want it straight; I want it without furbelows—without embellishment in any form. I want facts and not conjectures. I want the truth, the whole truth, and nothing more and nothing less than the truth. I think with that understanding you may begin."

"I am ready."

"Begin, then, with your experiences here before you take me to Asia with your tale, and if I interrupt you with questions, answer them if you can. I will agree to believe, unless and until I can prove that you have been mistaken or misled."

CHAPTER II.

ONLY ONE OF MANY MYSTERIES.

"I will be obliged to refer shortly to Asia, and to Nepal first," said Starbuck.

"All right," replied Nick. "Go on."

"I first made the acquaintance of Idayah there—in the country called Nepal—in a place in that country that is called the Sacred Valley. I had told you as much as that in my office at the Garden, before we were interrupted."

"Yes."

"And my recollection was remanded to that country, and to my strange experiences there by the sight of a small weapon that you had with you at the time—a weapon which was one of the instruments used in accomplishing the death of the baron."

"Yes."

"It was a dart, made in the shape of a dagger in miniature, and furnished with delicate, ivory wings, which open out when it is thrown, so that it will fly straight at the object at which it is aimed, point first; and the dart is poisoned, so that death will ensue almost instantly after a person is struck by it."

"Yes."

"Well, Carter, it had been a long time since I had even thought of my experiences in the Sacred Valley. I had schooled myself to forget them; but the sight of that dart not only recalled them vividly to mind, but it also assured me that Idayah—or at least an emissary of hers—was already in New York, and that a terrible danger, which I believed I had escaped, was on hand and present to menace me again."

"Yes. I saw that and realized it at the time. Go on."

"I plunged into the telling of my story at once, in the hope that I might get it through and told before Idayah could find out exactly where I was; and in the hope that

*See No. 531 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "Idayah, the Woman of Mystery."

if anything should happen to me, you being posted, would be in a position to come to my assistance."

The detective nodded his head.

"But you know how far I had proceeded in the story before we were interrupted. In fact, I had only begun it. I had told you only that in my passion for hunting and adventure my way had led me into that faraway and utterly unknown region."

"Yes."

"For, say what you like, the people who have told us stories about that country have told us only a very little of the truth, and have made up the rest out of whole cloth, or have revamped tales that they have heard from others."

"I believe that."

"First, then, let me say that the baron was killed because he had somehow penetrated that valley also. Don't suppose that I ever knew him or that I know anything about him now, for I did not and do not; *but unless he held the secrets that I hold now he would not have been killed.*"

"Well?"

"The instant when I saw that poisoned dart in your possession I knew that I was in immediate danger; I knew that the blow which had fallen upon the baron might also fall upon me at any moment, although, to tell you the truth, I had no real fear of being killed. What I did fear was that I would be taken away against my will and returned to that country, thus—to put it plainly—disappearing off the face of the earth."

Nick nodded.

"So I plunged into an immediate relation of the story. I neglected to lock the door, which was directly behind you. You know how far in the story I succeeded in getting; I had told you only that I was lost in those mountains, and had wandered to the top of a pass when I discovered a great valley far down below me, and in that valley there was a city, or what appeared to be a city——"

"Yes."

"And that I made my way down the mountain in the belief that in that city I could secure the services of a guide who would take me out again. That I descended to the valley, arriving there at nightfall—and then, of a sudden I stopped in my relation of the story, and told you, on your life not to move a muscle. Do you remember that?"

"Perfectly."

"The door behind you had opened, and Idayah stood there, with one of those same darts in her hand, menacing you."

"She opened it silently," said Nick, "for I did not hear a sound."

"Yes. She does everything silently. So do all her people. They are a silent people."

"Go on."

"I want to say right here that you have several times referred to that incident, as if you thought I had taken an unfair advantage of you in forcing you into a promise not to move or turn your head while she was there, but the fact is, Nick, had you done so, she would not have hesitated to scratch you with that dart; and one scratch from it would have been instantly fatal. Think of that when you blame me for that circumstance."

"All right," said the detective. "I understand."

"She had come there to get me, and she meant to do so. Your life, if it stood in the way of her purpose, would have been merely an incident. I knew that. I knew she was prepared to kill if need be; I knew that she held the instrument of death in her hand ready for instant use—and sitting as you were, with your back toward her, you could have done nothing to defend yourself. Say what you please, I saved your life that time by extorting that promise from you."

"I begin to believe you did. Then what? Go on from there."

"I think, Nick, that you know something about the 'sign-language' of our own Western Indians, don't you?"

"Yes."

"You know that it is possible for them to carry on long conversations without once uttering a word aloud, and that two Indians that do not know each other's language will converse as readily in the sign-talk as if they were chatting together normally."

"Yes."

"Those people have the same science, only it is much mort thoroughly developed. They can express whole phrases and sentences by a single gesture. When I was among them I became expert in the use of their sign-talk; and that day, when Idayah stood behind you, menacing you with that dart, she asked me, as soon as you had made that promise not to move, if you would keep your promise. I nodded to assure her that you would; and then she laid the dart aside and began to converse with me in the sign-talk.

"I say converse with me; I mean that she gave me her orders—for I made no replies to what she conveyed to me.

"But the substance of it was that I must leave you there and follow her. She said that I might say to you that I would return—and, when she ordered me to follow her, there was nothing for me to do save to obey. Just why I had to obey her—just why I still must obey her, you will know before I am finished with my story."

"All right."

"I will stick to what you wish, for the present, and relate to you what occurred to me after I followed her out of that office-room."

"Well?"

"She had told me in the sign-talk to follow her, but not to appear to be with her. She wore a veil which she drew over her face, and she led the way through the building to the street. The moment we entered a carriage she had in waiting, she gave me a piece of candy-like stuff, which you would describe as looking like a chocolate drop, and commanded me to eat, at the same time holding the poisoned dart within an inch of my arm, and I can assure you that from that moment, until I found myself under your care, very late that night—or was it the next morning?—I know nothing of what had happened. You say, you have told me, that you rescued me somewhere over in Jersey, after I had been nearly killed from being in a collision in the street; but I know nothing of what occured in the meantime.

"After that, you sent me away to my home, up the Hudson.

"Let me interpolate right here, that all royal messages in her own country, are written in red. You would say, with a red crayon. We will call it a crayon for want of a better term; but, what I wish to say is, that any person under the authority of those people to receive a command written in red, means that the order must be obeyed literally, on pain of death, and that death is sure to follow in some mysterious manner, if the order is not obeyed.

"Now, I had no sooner arrived at my place on the Hudson—that is, as soon as I had sufficiently recovered to be able to understand, I received one of the messages."

"Ferguson told me," the detective interrupted, referring to Starbuck's valet, "that you found many messages of that sort, sometimes under your pillow, sometimes in other places. He said that they were all left for you in a very mysterious manner."

"Yes. Only there is no mystery about it at all, when once you know how it is done."

"Suppose you pause in the story long enough to tell me how it is done, Starbuck?"

"Very well. You are familiar with the uses we make of the carrier-pigeon?"

"Certainly."

"In the Sacred Valley of Nepal, there is a trained pigeon—I should say that there are thousands of them—which are the messengers of the country. They are the wisest things in all the world, that have not the gift of speech. With our carrier-pigeon we are told that the carrying of messages is merely the result of the instinct which takes them directly to their homes. With the Nepal pigeons it is different, for one of them will go hundreds of miles away from home and deliver a message accurately; and it will return with a reply if it is directed to do so. It is merely necessary that the pigeon should have visited the place once before, and has been taught to associate that place with the sound of a certain word.

"In this case, Idayah had already found out that I had that home on the Hudson. She had visited it and found that I was absent. Believing that some day she would wish to send messages to me there, she had taken two of her birds with her."

"But how——"

"Wait just a moment. On that first occasion of her visit there, when I was *not* there, she went, of course, in her flying machine, about which I shall have more to say later on; and it was then that she left her first written order for me, to be found by me when I should reach there."

"I begin to understand you. She made her way into the house, from the roof or through one of the upper windows."

"Exactly; and she left her order, written in red, for me to read and to obey when I should have read it."

The detective nodded.

"That order told me among other things, that each day at a certain hour, I should leave a certain window open for the entrance of her messenger, when it should arrive. It is not strange, is it, that I should have found the messages when I returned to my room after having been down-stairs? It is not strange, is it, that when the time came to leave that window open for the messenger, that I should not only find an excuse to send Ferguson out of the room, but that I should leave it myself?"

"No; perhaps not."

"So much for that part of the mystery. I wish that all of them could be explained away as easily."

"Perhaps they can when we once get at it."

"Possibly; possibly; but if that is done, it will be you who does the explaining, for I have tried—and I have failed."

"Nevertheless, let us hear the rest of the story."

"Yes. The rest of the strange story, Carter. The rest of my story, which I have never yet told to living man."

CHAPTER III

WRITTEN IN RED.

"You must understand," Starbuck continued after a short pause, "that much of what has happened since that murder at the Garden, remains rather undeterminate in my mind. You must not forget that save for a fraction of the time that has elapsed since then, I have been under the influence of that subtle power which is wielded by Idayah."

"What is that subtle power?" the detective interrupted him.

"I don't know exactly. I will come to that part of my story presently. But you must not forget that whatever that power is, it has been exerted over me since her appearance here on that day. Since then, I have not for

a moment been free from the influence she exerts; I *am not free from it now.*"

"Well?"

"And, therefore, regarding many of the things that have happened, my mind is in a sort of haze. Things are distorted. They are not natural. My judgment as well as my understanding is warped. I am not—to put it plainly—exactly normal. Do you understand me?"

"Yes. I think so."

"And now to return to my stay at my country home."

"Yes."

"I have told you that I discovered the warning note of Idayah awaiting me on my arrival. I have told you that others followed it."

"Yes."

"At the hours stated in her order, I left the window, or one of them, open, for the coming of her messenger—the bird that I have described to you."

"Yes."

"It was a part of my policy to have Ferguson, my valet, out of the room at the time. To send him away on one pretext or another. And also to be absent from the room myself at such times."

"Yes."

"The notes were not pleasant things to look forward to. I was always dreading that one of them would contain an order for me to go away with her, back to the God-forsaken country where she lives and calls it home. Then came our first interview."

"Ah, yes. Tell me about those interviews. Ferguson already has told me something of them. He told me about hearing voices in your room at times when he was sure that you were alone. About hearing two voices, one of them a woman's; and he ascribed it all to supernatural doings."

"I have no doubt of that. He is Scotch, you know."

"Well?"

"The message came which told me to be prepared to receive Idayah in person, at eleven o'clock one morning—or near that hour. Now I must interpolate one thing right here. I don't know whether you will understand me or not; but—each time when she is expected, an uncontrollable desire for sleep comes over me. I am compelled to lie down. I am forced to close my eyes. I do not lose consciousness; I do not actually sleep; but there is that same feeling precisely which one has when sleep is almost, though not quite, overpowering to the senses."

"I think I understand you. It is mesmerism—hypnotism."

"That is exactly what it is *not*. It is something else, although the effects are the same."

"Well; go on. We won't argue about that now."

"The hour approached at which I was to expect her, and that unaccountable feeling of lassitude came over me, compelling me against my will to lie down and wait; *and then before I realized it at all she stood before me in my room at the Manor House.*"

"And you did not know how she got there?"

"I did not care how she got there—at the time. It was enough that she was there."

"But—you did not know at the time how she got there?"

"No."

"But—you know now?"

"Why, yes. I know now, as you do. I know very little more than you know. I have long been aware that the science of navigation through the air, even at great heights, is known to her people, and has been known to them doubtless for centuries past. So of course I understand that she came to me in that manner."

"But since that time you have been with her on the flying machine, Starbuck."

"I am coming to that also, presently. I must not approach these things too rapidly."

"That is true. Take your own method."

"Idayah came; she stood before me in all her strange, weird, matchless beauty—for she *is* beautiful. You will admit that."

"Yes. I will admit that, Starbuck."

"She knows the power which her beauty exercises over me, and when she is present, it is the only power she has to exert. She is aware of that also."

"No doubt of it. Women are usually aware of such power as that."

"I think—on the occasion of that first call—she remained with me about an hour. I am not sure. But it was all of that. Her purpose was to tell me that when the time came, which she said would be soon, I must prepare myself to return to the Sacred Valley with her, and to remain there for the remainder of my life."

"Wait a moment, Starbuck. Are you in love with——"

"We must not anticipate," said Starbuck, with some show of impatience. "I will come to all that during the recital of my story. You must let me state all that I have to tell you in my own way."

"All right. All right."

"I rebelled at that. I asked her to remain here instead of insisting that I should go away with her, but there were and are reasons, she insists, why that is not to be thought of. She insisted that I should prepare myself to return to the Sacred Valley with her—and of course I had to consent. There was nothing else for me to do."

"I suppose not. Go on."

"She gave me two months to make my arrangements; to settle up my affairs, as if I were preparing to die, don't you know?"

"Well, it amounted to about the same thing as far as you were concerned, I should say."

"Yes."

"But why did she give you the two months? What I cannot understand is why she did not fly away with you at once, without waiting for any lapse of time."

"Nor I—that is, definitely. But I know this, or rather I suspect it with some degree of certainty: I think that she and her people are establishing what might be called missions all over the world. I think it is now their intention to spread their teachings everywhere. Idayah admits to me that she had no idea that the world had grown so large, or was so densely peopled, until she came out of the Sacred Valley in search of me."

"But it is three years since you were there. Why has she waited all this time before she came in search of you?"

"That was three years ago—yes. But she was not the ruler of that strange people then. Now, she is."

"I see. Go on. You may explain that also, later on."

"Yes. Finding that the outside world has grown so large, and is so densely peopled, she being wise—and she is wise—realizes that if things go on as they are now, not more than another century can elapse before her country will be invaded by explorers, travelers, and scientists, and that by sheer force of numbers, her people will be overpowered—or, to use her own simile of expression, her people will be smothered and choked to death, just as the Virginia creeper chokes out the sturdy life of the giant oak. You understand?"

"Perfectly."

"To begin a campaign to offset that, she has caused missions—I cannot think of a better word to express what I mean—to be started in different parts of the world, so that when the time comes to set up a line of defense, she will have thousands of followers who are out in the world, to fight for her and for her secrets."

"But you say yourself that that will be a hundred years hence, and——"

"Nevertheless, it will be her—*her, in person*—that they will fight against, just the same. You do not understand that now—but you will before I have finished."

"It seems to me, Starbuck, that we are getting momentarily deeper and deeper into the mysteries. But go on."

"At all events, she gave me the two months in which to make my preparations for leaving the world—or as you expressed it a moment ago, for dying."

"It would amount to that."

"It would, and she intended that it should. The influence she held over me once, by the mere beauty of person which she possesses, she sought to establish anew; and she did establish it."

"I don't think there can be any doubt of that."

"When I am with her, Carter, I am as a ball of clay in the hands of a sculptor. She can mold me as she will, and I am not only passive under the operation, but I am happy because of it."

"Then you are in love with her."

"Call it that, if you will. It is not, perhaps, exactly the word, but it will suffice. When I am with her, I am clay; when she has gone, my manhood reasserts itself and I rebel. Then she reappears, and it is all to be done over again."

"I understand."

"There at the Manor House, she came and went almost at will. How she came to me I did not inquire. How she departed, I did not care. How she came and went without being seen by others did not concern me. I only waited, waited, waited.

"We had frequent interviews, as Ferguson no doubt told you."

"Yes."

"Each time when she left me, I was—or rather I remained in that condition of half-stupor, which the doctors and you as well supposed to be the result of a drug. Well, I think you are and were largely correct about that, in the initial; *but it was not the effect of drugging as we understand the term.* It is enough that she left me always in that half-stupor from which I did not rouse until it was time for her to appear again."

"I am beginning to understand you better. You mean that she has subtle things which we may call drugs for want of a better term to apply, which she administered, which gave her the power over you during her absence. But go on."

"Day by day I fell again as deeply into her power as I had ever been. Day by day I began to look for her coming, as I once looked for it in the Sacred Valley. Between her visits, I was in that half-stupor; when she appeared, I was as fully in possession of my senses as you have ever known me to be, save the one clause that I was wholly hers. There was no half-way measure about that. I watched for her coming; I longed for it—and at last the moment came when she told me that I could return to the city and renew my activity here, in preparation for the departure which we were to make together, when I was not to return."

"Yes."

"And so, she left me alone for several days. So I came wholly out of the stupor into which she had thrown me. So I recovered and became myself again; and so I returned to the city, to my apartment—and so, thinking the whole thing over, *I resolved to send for you and to tell you the story from beginning to end.*"

"I see. Go on."

"How did she know that I intended to do that? How did she know it? I had no sooner made up my mind to that course, than I was conscious that she had somehow been informed of my decision. And yet, although I was conscious that she knew my decision and would prevent

its fulfilment, I adhered to it. I sent you the message to come to me at my rooms—and then——"

"And then you heard from her again, eh?"

"Then I received another message written in red."

CHAPTER IV.

SOME OF THE SECRETS UNVEILED.

"I had sent you the message. I had told Ferguson that I was expecting you, and that you were to be admitted at once when you came, when the influence of Idayah swept across me like a translucent cloud, and that overpowering inclination to sleep took possession of me. I was in the room from which I disappeared. I called out to Ferguson, intending to order him to remain in the room with me, but when he appeared in answer to my call, I had not power to tell him what I had determined to say. I could only call for some of the tonic he was in the habit of giving me at stated intervals.

"He brought the tonic to me. I took it. I told him that I would rest for a while and not to disturb me. The words were not mine. They were put into my mouth and uttered by me without will of my own. He went out of the room. The door was closed. I found a difficulty in breathing. I hastened to the window and threw it open for a breath of air; *and as I threw it open, a messenger bird flew into the room.* It was one of Idayah's messengers. I knew it. I recognized it.

"It did not alight anywhere. It flew into the room and out again, but as it came it dropped its message at my feet. It was an order, written in red."

"I found it," said the detective, taking a folded bit of paper from his pocketbook and he was startled by an exclamation from Starbuck.

"For God's sake, Carter, do not open that message here, now. Do not unfold that bit of paper now, on your life. That is, if you wish me to finish my story. Put it back out of my sight. Put it back!"

The detective did so at once; and Starbuck breathed a sigh of relief.

"Do not show it to me—do not look at it yourself, at least, until we have finished this conversation," he said.

"All right," said Nick; and he returned the strange message to his pocket. "Go on with your story."

A shudder, as if at a narrow escape, passed over the athletic form of Starbuck. He turned quickly toward the table and lighted a fresh cigar, upon which he smoked furiously for a moment. Then he said:

"I know what the message is that you found, although you do not. It is written in a language which is unknown to you; which is unknown to all of what we call the civilized world. But to me it was plain. I will translate the meaning of it to you."

"I wish you would do so."

"It said: 'Open your window wide. I will be with you in a few moments.'"

"And you obeyed, of course."

"Obeyed? There was nothing else for me to do. The strange part of it all is that at such moments—that is, when I received messages like that, I have no inclination *not* to obey. My whole desire is to do as she says as quickly and as surely as possible."

"So your dread of her messages exists only *before* you receive them. It does *not* exist *after* you receive them."

"That is the idea. The dread is *before* they come. After they are in my possession, I am unqualifiedly glad."

"Well; you had the message before you; you read it; what did you do then?"

"I did as she bade me do. I opened the window wide—as far as it would go. I stood back a little way from it, waiting—and presently she appeared."

"Ah! There is something that I wish to know. I want to know just *how* she appeared. I mean that I wish to know exactly *how* she got down to your window. Wait a moment; let me tell you just what I found there."

"Well?"

"The window was closed——"

"Yes; she closed it after we went out."

"But my dear fellow, you are speaking of stepping out of a window that is situated sixteen stories above the ground as indifferently as if it were on the ground floor."

"I know it."

"I found the windows of that room closed. I found the doors locked on the inside, save for the one door into the adjoining room, through which it was known that you had not passed. Your disappearance was a mystery which for a time seemed impossible of solution. At last I went to the roof of the building. There is a stairway to the roof. It lets out upon the roof through a hooded doorway. That roof door has been kept locked ever since the close of the season. The manager of the hotel went there with me. He unlocked the door. He told me that nobody could have been on that roof without his knowledge and that he was sure nobody had been there."

"I know, I know, I know."

The only explanation for your disappearance was by way of the roof, and yet there was no way—apparently—of leaving that roof save through the building, and it was absolutely certain that nobody had passed through that way."*

"I know, I tell you."

"When we got to the roof and opened the door upon it, as I have described, there were traces in the snow there of what appeared to be ladders. They were in parallel lines, with cross lines between them, and——"

"Yes."

*See No. 534.

"And they led from that door directly to the edge of the roof over that part of the court where your windows are located."

"Yes."

"And for that reason I came to the decision that some sort of a flying machine had been used. That afternoon and evening from my room here I telephoned all over the country, to every expert in aeronautics I could think of. From the Wright Brothers, in Ohio, I received the information that *it was possible that a flying machine might have done the deed. They informed me that they could have accomplished exactly what I described to them with one of the machines of their invention.* Don't you see, Starbuck, what that admission from them meant to me?"

"Yes."

"It meant that the thing was *possible*. That was the point. If the Wright Brothers could do it, why it followed that somebody else might also be able to do it. Inventions have traveled along parallel lines always. The telephone was discovered—that is, the principle of it was discovered at about the same time in two widely separated parts of the world. Why should it not be the same with aeronautics?"

"Exactly."

"Now, one word more, and then I want you to continue. From the position on the roof of the traces in the snow, and after I had determined in my own mind that some sort of a flying machine had been used, I arrived at the conclusion that Idayah had let herself down to your window from the ends of her machine which projected over the edge of the roof, by making use of some sort of pulley and rope system. Now go on. How did she get to your window?"

"To tell you that, Nick," was the reply, "I must stop in the relation of my story right here, to describe in detail the flying machine. I have seen many of them. I have ridden on them. Shall I take the time now to describe them?"

"No. Not in detail. We must not neglect the main story. Just tell me how she got to that window and how she took you out of it, and to the roof."

"I can do that in a few words. Idayah and the people of her country, when they wish to fly through the air, have a means of decreasing their weight, individually. For example, my natural weight is two hundred pounds. It can be reduced by their methods, so that it is not more than fifty pounds. I do not mean by that that my actual weight is reduced, but that it is overcome."

"I don't understand you."

"I mean that they manufacture a gas, with the combination of chemicals, which has, as nearly as I can figure it, about four hundred times the lifting power of any gas that we know about; I mean that when one of them—Idayah, for instance—wishes to fly, she provides herself with a suit which is not unlike Boynton's famous swimming suit. You know about that?"

"Yes."

"The suit, once donned, is inflated with the gas I have mentioned. Stockton, in one of his inimitable stories, once described an invention whereby the attraction of gravitation was overcome—you remember?"

"Yes."

"Well, in effect, this is the same thing—only that the attraction of gravitation is overcome by a gas of powerful lifting qualities; that is all."

"I see. I see. Funny that nobody has ever turned their inventive genius in that direction, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"I am beginning to see through this thing and how simple it is, after all—if one only is familiar with the secret of it. It is no more wonderful—not half so wonderful, in fact—as the phonograph."

"Exactly."

"Go on."

"Idayah, with her aerial suit inflated, can induce her weight—strange as it may seem—to nothing. She can skim over the ground, barely touching it, or she can actually leap from the ground and bound along it almost at will. On a level stretch, with the wind, she could travel with the same speed as the wind happened to be blowing, touching the ground only here and there as she went, performing exactly the same undulating bounds as a very light rubber ball."

"We may go rather more deeply into that later on, eh?"

"Yes."

"But there were your two hundred pounds to lift out of that window, from the sixteenth floor of the building to the top of it, Starbuck."

"Yes. And there was also the machine on the roof, and the fiber rope, as strong and as light as, or lighter than, aluminum; there was also the verticle wheel of the machine; its application to the rope and the pulleys. She had only to place the loop of the rope under my arms, to glide up it herself to the machine hand over hand, to apply the power, to lift me to the roof without any exertion of her own, and the thing was done. It was as simple from her own standpoint, and because of the machinery she had at hand, as it would have been for you to have lifted me out of the hold of a ship with the aid of a donkey engine—and it was done entirely on the same principle."

"All right. It may all sound very plausible to you, but it is a little bit vague to me—as yet. I've no doubt that I shall understand all these remarkable things some time, but I'm blowed if I do now."

"Shall I return to the main part of the story?"

"Yes. We may go into these particulars later on."

"You know already about that strange condition of mind into which her presence compells me. You know

that although I dread the receipt of her messages, I am always glad when I receive them. You know that although I dread her coming, I am never so happy as when she is with me. You know all that."

"Yes. You have told me."

"Naturally, the consequence was, that the moment she appeared at the window and stepped into the room, I was happy that she was there. I became as stealthy as she was, lest Ferguson in the next room should hear us. I helped her in making the arrangements for taking me out at the window. I put on, without her aid, the garment that she brought to me, which was to keep me warm, and which was also to be inflated as soon as it was possible to do it. I put it on over my jacket; and then——"

"Then you went out at the window and left us to study out as best we could how you had disappeared so mysteriously."

"Yes."

CHAPTER V.

STARBUCK'S WONDERFUL ADVENTURE.

"It was cold, if you will remember; but with the suit that she brought to me, I did not feel the cold. As soon as we were upon the roof of the building, she inflated the suit that I wore, so that my own weight was reduced. It only takes a moment to do that, for upon the machines they use for flying, there is always a supply of the chemicals for making the gas—the lifting gas; and it requires only a moment to manufacture sufficient for such a purpose."

"Go on. Go on."

"There are straps upon the machine to hold a person in place. There are also arrangements that are automatic in their action, for ballasting the flyer. Within five minutes after we were on the roof, we were away again; and we flew straight to—where do you suppose?"

"It wouldn't surprise me at this stage of the game if you were to tell me that you flew straight to Nepal and back again, just for a little exercise. It is only about twelve thousand miles."

"Don't joke, Carter; and don't get sarcastic. I am in deadly earnest. All this may sound utterly impossible to you—but it is all as real to me as you are real, sitting there where you are now, directly in front of me."

"I believe. I promised to believe. To what place did you fly?"

"To my home up the Hudson. To my home, the Manor. There are only the caretakers there now, since I left with Ferguson, the other day. We alighted on the roof. We descended to my room through the cupola. We stayed somewhere in the neighborhood of an hour, or if we were denied for the sense, for I stepped in my room, and put on a suit, and then I went down and found the caretaker and his wife. We had been built; we had dinner prepared for us; we remained there until evening; and then——"

"Now you are getting to the gist of the thing. You are getting to the one point that has puzzled me more than any other. I mean in regard to Idayah's method of procedure; not in regard to the wonderful things she does."

"Well, to put it plainly, Idayah was convinced that I had told you too much. She was certain that you knew more about her affairs than she cared to have you know at the present time, and she convinced herself that she could make a convert of you if only she could get you where she would have the opportunity to convince you."

"I see," said the detective, with a grim smile. "Possibly she was right about that, too. But go on."

"We decided to come here to this house after you. We believed that we could alight on the roof with the flying machine, so that you would not guess that we were here. We were to make our way down through the interior of the house, to you; she was to render you unconscious with one of her drugs, and together we were to take you to the roof, put you aboard of the flying machine, and take you away to the Manor."

"Nice little arrangement, wasn't it?"

"Whether it was nice or not, that *was* the arrangement—*and if you had happened to be sleeping when we arrived here it would have worked, too.*"

"I have no doubt of it."

"You would have been as helpless in her hands as I am, if once she could have injected into your veins a single drop of that drug of hers."

The detective nodded his head, but he made no reply.

"But fate willed it that you should have put out the light in this room where we are sitting now, and should have stepped to the window at the very instant when we flew above it, so that you saw the shadow of the great bird—the flying machine."

"Yes."

"Having already communicated with the Wright Brothers and others, you had come to the decision that a flying machine of some sort was employed in this business, and so the instant you saw that shadow, you realized, or rather, you guessed what made it."

"You are right about that."

"And we had no idea that you had seen us. We did see the light go out—but we did not know what you had guessed."

"Then you went to the roof. You saw the outlines of the machine there. You saw Idayah and I standing together, talking in low tones. We had already thrown aside the inflated clothing and made it fast to the machine so that it would not float away. We were on the point of going ahead with our plans—and I want you to understand that at that time I was as much in earnest about your capture as she was—when Idayah became

conscious that you were watching us from behind your roof door.

"The needle, Nick, that she had prepared for you, she jabbed into me—*and that is why I have been since that time unable to tell you the story.*"

"I understand."

"You know the rest. You know how you leaped forward, and upon the machine. You know how Idayah tried to fly away with you upon it, and how she almost succeeded. In fact you know more about that time, about those few moments, than I know. All that I remember is that I got a fall somehow."

"That was when I cut the straps that held you to the machine, and seizing you in my arms, sprang off it when it was twenty feet in the air, and alighted with you on top of me, on my own roof."

"Exactly."

"You certainly had your full weight with you at that moment."

"Yes, it is a wonder that you were not crushed, Nick."

"I was—almost."

"Well; there my information ends. I think I have brought you now up to the point where I can tell you the story of the Sacred Valley itself, eh?"

"Yes."

"Shall I go right ahead with it?"

"Yes."

"It takes me back three years. I will begin at the top of the mountain, when I was lost in the wilds of Nepal, and had wandered up what seemed to be a well-traveled trail to the pass."

"Yes."

"I don't know what the altitude was, only that it was very high; probably thirteen or fourteen thousand feet. I had been in high altitudes for months and had accustomed myself to them. While you could not have breathed there, only with difficulty at least, had you been taken there suddenly, I had been in the altitude so long that it did not affect me."

"I know about that. I have hunted with others, at that altitude, in Mexico, and in the Andes Mountains."

"Well; the pass took me through the mountains—that is, through a gorge in the mountains, so that when I came out on the opposite side I saw before me, and far, far down, so that the buildings looked like doll-houses, a city.

"You are familiar enough with the ancient architecture of that country—I refer to India generally, now—to realize something of the appearance of those houses and temples as I approached them; only I will say that they differed from anything that I had ever seen before; differed so greatly that as I approached them more nearly I began to think that I was coming to an unusual place, and recalled stories that had been told me about a place which was called the Sacred Valley, from which white men and natives of the country alike never returned.

"I wondered if it could be the Sacred Valley that I was approaching.

"One may descend a mountain much more rapidly than one can ascend it; nevertheless, I was fourteen hours steadily on my feet in making that descent, and when at last I did reach the bottom of the valley, my fatigue was so great that I could scarcely place one foot in front of the other."

"That goes without saying, Starbuck."

"I approached a gateway, formed by two immense pillars. I passed through them—between them, that is. I saw several people, standing as if they were awaiting my approach—and afterward I knew that such was the case.

"But I barely saw them, so great was my fatigue. I approached them, holding out my hands. I saw only that all were blonds, as far as hair and skin were concerned, but with black eyes and handsome features. I saw a tall man approach us—and then my weariness got the better of me. I knew that succor was at hand, and I collapsed."

"Fainted?"

"Yes. Lost consciousness. Shall I go on with the story as it unfolded itself to me?"

"Yes. I will understand it better in that way."

"When consciousness returned to me I was in a lofty chamber. It was warm and airy, and you can imagine my astonishment when I discovered that it was not only lighted, but heated with electricity."

"Oh, come now, Starbuck! Don't go in too heavy, you know!"

"It is a fact, Nick; and it is simple enough after all."

"All the things relative to that country seem to be marvelously simple, Starbuck. Don't you think so?"

"Yes"—with perfect earnestness—"that is really the most wonderful thing about it all; the simplicity with which they accomplish things."

"Well; it was electricity. What more?"

"Wait. It *was* electricity. Didn't you see something in one of the papers the other day about a chap somewhere in the *West* who has discovered how to draw electricity from the air, so that he utilizes it for lighting and heating his own house and stables?"

"Yes, I saw it and read it; but I didn't swallow it."

"That is what is done in the Sacred Valley. The electricity is drawn from the air. The apparatus is not unlike in its arrangement the one that is in use now for the wireless telegraphy. The electricity is drawn from the air. The power is as great as they care to draw. It outdoes our most powerful generating plants. They do everything with it—have used it for ages. It is not their invention. It is God's. Those people merely know what we have yet to learn: *They know what electricity is.*"

"I see the point."

"If you ask Edison what electricity is, he will tell you that he does not know. Nobody knows, he will say. All that is known is that it is a power which can be applied

to certain things, but the real source of that power is not known. Not long ago somebody told us, when radium was discovered, that *it* was the real source of electricity. Possibly it is. All that I can assure you about it is that the people of the Sacred Valley *do* know what it is, and that they get it from the air about them, and apply it to everything which enters into their lives. They say that it is the source of life."

"They can say that it is anything at all, and nobody can deny them, for nobody knows that they are not right."

"Exactly; and they know that they *are* right. And I don't see why they haven't as much right to their statement as we have to ours—especially since they utilize it in ways that are as wonderful to me now as one of our present automobiles would have been wonderful to the Plymouth fathers."

"Go on. In this age a man may believe anything at all. I believe. Go on."

"I came to my senses, as I have already said, in a lofty and spacious room which was warmed and lighted by electricity. I arose from the couch where I had been lying, and found that I had been bathed, and that I was dressed in a costume such as I had never seen before. More than that, the clothing I wore was of a richness that astounded me. I won't stop now to describe it, only to say that the texture was fine and light and beautiful, and that the clasps upon it—there were no such things as buttons, you know—the clasps upon it were jewels and gems, so astonishing in their size and brilliancy, that if I had not been an expert and so known them to be real, I would not have believed it."

"Go on! Go on!" exclaimed Nick impatiently.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MAGIC GONG.

"There were no chairs in the room—that is, not what we would call chairs. There were couches galore. There were rugs, the richest that you can imagine. There were tapestries which would put to the blush the finest that you ever saw hung upon the walls of palaces.

"The walls of the room were mosaic—and *such* mosaic. The mosaics that we know about were made but yesterday in comparison with them. Works of art, they were.

"The room was lofty; there was a dome at the top of it. There were also windows on every side, so I concluded that I was in some sort of a tower. I knew also that outside it was night, for otherwise there would have been no need for the electric lights, with all those windows in the room.

"Over in one corner there was a mirror—as perfect a mirror as you ever saw—and I crossed to it and looked at myself curiously.

"I suppose you looked as if you had dressed for a masquerade, eh?" said Nick.

"Yes; if you put it that way. But rather, I looked as if I were some Eastern potentate—some high mogul—a Shah of Persia without the fez, or a Sultan of the Arabian Nights. There was no doubting the genuineness of the jewels, or the texture of the garments I wore. Nick, did you ever see a Japanese gong?"

"Yes," replied Nick, wondering what was coming now.

"There was just such a gong hanging from a bracket against the circular wall of the room. It was a succession of bells, you know, seven in number, hung one above another with the cups inverted; the largest one at the top and the smallest one at the bottom."

"Well?"

"Beneath it, on a small inlaid table, was a stick with a leather ball at the end of it. It was for sounding the gong. I studied that all out, and then I raised the stick and struck first one and then another of the cuplike bells until I had run rapidly down the whole seven of them.

"Do you know, Nick, that I had to dodge back and cover my ears with my hands, or I think I would have been deafened, almost. It was not the noise of the gongs, either; it was the vibration."

"The vibration! And not the noise! Eh?"

"The vibration. Hasn't your study of science ever told you that there is nothing on earth that can withstand the terrible force of vibration, when it acts in harmony? It is a power which, if applied correctly, would rend the world into chaos; would tear the planets from the universe and send them hurling through space. You have heard the old problem of what would be the result if an irresistible power were to crash against an immovable barrier, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, *vibration* is the irresistible power; the immovable barrier has never been discovered."

"It occurs to me that I am taking lessons in science to-day."

"You will have to take lots of them, Nick, if you go with me, in imagination, to the Sacred Valley."

"All right. Go ahead."

"The vibration engendered in that room when I struck the cups of the gong was so terrible that I pressed my palms over my ears; I rushed to the couch and threw myself upon it; I felt as if my head was bursting, and yet I was not conscious of a din of noise.

"But there were other noises outside the building. It seemed that I had set every intoning object in the world going. From everywhere came the sound of bells.

"I felt that I was going mad with the din of it all—with the terror of it. I still held the stick in my hand, with which I had struck the gong, and in desperation I hurled from the couch and flung the stick with all the strength at the thing I had struck.

"My aim was not good, thank Heaven.

"The stick missed the object at which it was aimed; it flew past it, and into a niche in the wall, where, if you will believe it, it struck forcibly against another arrangement of gongs that I had not seen until that instant.

"It struck the large one—the top one, you know, and—well, *the thing was over.*"

"What do you mean? The thing was over."

"By striking the second arrangement of gongs, I had put in action another wave of vibrations. Vibrations must work in harmony or not at all. The second gong was not in harmony with the first one. The waves clashed; they hooked together, as it were, so that neither could exert their power, with the result that both quieted down, and in a moment were still."

Nick Carter ticked something off on his fingers.

"Gee!" he said, with a smile. "You have gone from one science to another, until I am dizzy-headed. You began with aeronautics, then you touch upon electrics, and now—what shall we call this one?—vibratics? acoustics? What will it be next?"

"Oh, there are others. I have scarcely begun yet."

"Well; get back to the room. What happened when the vibrations ceased?"

"The first thing that happened was that the terrible rending pains left my head and my body. The next that I was conscious of was that two doors, at opposite sides of the room, opened simultaneously, and people rushed inside as if they were fired out of a gun. They fell upon me savagely. Rugs and things were thrown over my head. I was almost smothered. I believed that I was about to be murdered. I felt myself lifted from the floor and borne away somewhere."

"That vibration business had stirred them up, evidently."

"It certainly had. I thought it was all up with me, anyhow. I knew that I was carried out of the room. I was hustled along a corridor; but the strange part of it was that I heard no sound. The people who had crowded me made no sound at all. They did not exclaim or talk."

"And then——?" said Nick.

"Then I was suddenly set upon my feet; the rugs and things were torn from my head so I could see and breathe."

"You could speak, too, and I should have thought you would have felt inclined to do so after the handling you had received."

"I think I was too much astonished to swear, if that is what you mean," replied Starbuck. "Astonished, I mean, by what I saw when the rugs were taken from around me and I was permitted to use my eyes."

"Tell me what you did see."

"I saw——*Idayah.*"

"Was that the first time you ever saw her?" asked the detective quietly.

"Yes"—dreamily—"the first time I ever saw her. She was dressed in a robe not unlike the one worn by myself, with the changes that would be necessary to adapt it to feminine uses, for it was draped from her shoulders and formed a train behind her; and there were young girls standing silently there whose duty it evidently was to bear her train when she walked.

"It was of rich brocaded stuff—brocaded with gold and gems, you know. I do not know if I am technically right in this description, but you will understand what I mean. Also, there seemed to be a great deal of ivory used in ornamental ways, and it seemed to have a significance. For example, from her shoulders there were two small wings standing erect, that were made of ivory, and they were exactly like the wings of that poisoned dart that we both know about."

"Go on. What else?"

"Her hair, as you know, is so blond that it is almost white. Over that she wore a crown which, although it was made of ivory, was in exact imitation of the gong I had struck in the room where I had awakened, and which had brought about such surprising results.

"She was standing in front of me, seemingly in the center of the room, and, save for the young girls who seemed to be train-bearers, I could see no other person.

"The silence in that great room was absolute. One might have heard the figurative pin drop, if one had listened for it.

"I waited, thinking that she would speak; waited until the silence and the oppression resulting from it became unbearable; and then—I speak Hindustance fairly well—I spoke to her.

"Carter, you think that Idayah is beautiful, but you should see her in her own country, arrayed in her native costume, to understand how superbly beautiful she really is. When I spoke to her, she smiled—and she replied to me readily enough.

"And her voice—you have heard it—was like the voice of angels; like——"

"Like the voices you read about," suggested the detective.

"If you interrupt me I will not tell the story. Her voice was like that vibrant sound that I had loosed from the confinement of the gong in my own room, and it seemed to set everything in the great room where we were standing to ringing in harmony with it.

"When I spoke again, in answer to what she said, the vibration ceased; when she answered me, it started again; and so on. I have told you that it is a country of silent people; that they rarely speak at all. Do you understand now why that is so?"

"No."

"It is because their voices—all of them—are trained in harmony with their surroundings. Or rather it is because every metal thing in their world is made to respond

to one tone. The silence among them is to refrain from starting that vibration which will extend from one object to another until the whole world seems to ring with it, in a wonderful way; and in a way that is as appalling as it is wonderful."

"What did you say when you spoke to her first?"

"I asked her if she could understand me, and she replied that she could, perfectly well; and also that she would be able to understand me if I had spoken in other tongues. Try your own language, for example, she said to me, 'whatever that may be. I do not doubt that I will be able to reply to you.'

"I hadn't much idea that she could speak English, but I tried it, and behold she spoke it almost as well as I. You have heard her speak. You know how well she talks."

"Yes."

"I told her that I was very glad indeed of the opportunity to speak to somebody; that I had been rather startled by the manner in which I was conducted into her presence, but since I was uninjured, I did not mind it; whereupon she laughed quite naturally and told me that I had startled her people more than I had been startled.

"'Why?' I asked her.

"'Because of your knowledge of the vibrations,' she made answer.

"I remained discreetly silent at that. If I had any knowledge of the vibrations she referred to, more than had been attained while I was burying my head in the rugs on the couch in my room, I was not aware of it.

"After she had waited a moment and I made no reply, she continued:

"'You came to us as a stranger. Under ordinary conditions your life was forfeited by coming here—or, you may have been permitted to live, under certain circumstances. But——' She stopped right there, Carter, and, turning about, she waved her hand to the girls who stood behind her, and having turned her back to me, she watched them until they had left the room.

"In the meantime, that vibration produced by the sound of her voice was increasing with every instant, so that by the time the door had closed behind the young girls and she had turned again to me, everything was ringing with it until I again felt inclined to hide my head in pain.

"As she turned back toward me and came a step nearer, she said quickly:

"'Speak!'

"'What shall I say?' I demanded; and she smiled, saying:

"'It is enough.'

"I knew then what she meant, for again with the sound of my voice the vibrations ceased, and we stood together in silence.

"'What does it mean?' I asked her, in amazement; and taking one more step nearer to me, she replied smilingly:

"'You will presently understand.'"

CHAPTER VII.

THE GREATEST FORCE IN THE WORLD.

"Carter, if I tell you this story of mine so that you can appreciate it, you must try to school your mind to the belief that I am telling it about a third person. Do you think you can do that?"

"I suppose so; but you had better tell me just what you mean."

"I mean that the circumstances by which I was surrounded were so strange that when I look back upon them myself, I find it difficult to credit myself with the belief that it was I and not another who was concerned.

"Without retailing too much of the conversation that took place between Idayah and myself at that particular time, I wish to say that I had, unwittingly, to be sure, fulfilled a prophecy in striking that gong as I did; and that I had sort of clinched the thing when I stopped the vibrations by striking the second one."

"And that you did wholly by accident."

"Yes. I did not even know the gong was there—the second gong, that is. I threw the stick at the first one, missed it and hit the other one without having seen it; but the sound of it stopped the vibrations."

"And the two, taken together, fulfilled a prophecy?"

"Yes. In a word, the first one sounded the doom of a high personage; the second one proclaimed a new goddess to rule over the land."

"Ah!" said the detective, with a smile. "So the Sacred Valley is a land that is ruled by a goddess, eh?"

"Exactly. It is altogether too common and too ordinary to say a queen; and in reality Idayah is much greater, much more powerful, than a queen could be."

"Do you mean to tell me that Idayah is the—*goddess?*"

"Precisely."

"Then what—— But go on with your story. It is not well to anticipate. I presume we will get to it all after a while."

"Yes."

"You said something about having sounded a knell of doom, eh?"

"Don't chaff, Carter. This is no place and no occasion for it."

"I won't. Pardon me."

"I have already told you something about the terrible forces of vibration practised by those people, but you can have no idea how wonderful and how far reaching it all is."

"Suppose you try to give me the idea, then."

"I have already told you how the sound of the voice of Idayah, in that great room where we met for the first time, set everything to ringing in harmony with it, and how everything continued to ring until the sound of *my* voice interfered and stopped the vibrations."

"Yes."

"Let me continue my explanations, then, by assuring you that every household in that land is arranged on the same plan. The voices of the women of a household are attuned to a certain key; the voices of the men to another key. One tune of harmony will run through an entire family to the collateral relatives, so——"

"So that if the sisters, and cousins, and aunts, and other female relatives should all get together, and should all talk at the same time, they would set things humming at such a rate that the dishes in the closets would be broken and the house would literally fall down about their ears."

"Although you speak in jest, Carter, that is the truth. I want you to understand, if I can make you do so, just how it is."

"I think I do understand already."

"Nevertheless, let me explain a little further."

"All right."

"We are seated now in your private study. Now, if we should render this room into a reproduction of one of the rooms of a house in the Sacred Valley, we would have to begin by arranging everything in the room so that it would ring with sound; if those bronze statues on the shelf were struck suddenly by another metal, they would ring; if the ink-stand on your desk were struck sharply, it would ring—and if every one of the other substances in this room, of which there are hundreds if you should stop to count them, were struck sharply and suddenly, they would ring out a responsive note."

"I understand that."

"Now, if you can suppose that each one of those many hundred articles were attuned to the same tune of harmony—carefully and scientifically attuned—before it was placed in this room, you can understand that if you struck *one* of them a sharp blow, *every one of them would ring out in reply.*"

The detective nodded his head.

"A stroke against one of them would, by vibration, set all the others to sounding as well."

"Yes," said Nick.

"Now, again, if each one of the articles had been carefully made or selected to harmonize with the tone of your voice in speaking, or if you, being born here, were taught from infancy to harmonize your voice with those tones, or that tone, to be more exact, it would follow that each time you spoke you would set everything in the room to ringing. Is that plain?"

"Perfectly."

"And you understand it?"

"Certainly; it is a scientific fact; it amounts almost to a law of nature."

"It is a law of nature, as you would understand if you had ever visited the Sacred Valley, where the law of vibration is the dominant law of their world."

"Well?"

"Now, one more point about it and then I will get back to what I was telling you."

"Yes?"

"In every household there is the masculine and the feminine element. In a household where there are both men and women, and several of each, if the voices of the men as well as of the women were attuned to the same tone, the result would be as you said a moment ago."

"How was that?"

"You said if they all got to talking at once, the house would fall down about their ears."

"Yes."

"That is literally true, although it sounds preposterous. Vibration is the greatest force in the world, and the least understood of any force or power, although it is the most common. If the men and the women of a household, arranged like that, talked in the same tone, there could never be any conversations at all. Absolute silence would be the rule."

"And so in each house in the Sacred Valley there are two tones, eh? Do the men have ornaments that respond to their voices, as well as the women?"

"Assuredly; and the consequence is that when men or women are alone in a house without the presence of one of the other sex, they do not talk."

"That would seem to me to be a delightful arrangement for suppressing gossip."

"Precisely; and strangely enough, according to the history of the Sacred Valley, that was the arrangement of it. They have a Garden of Eden, too, in their theology, and the greatest sin in their decalogue is slander."

"Go on. This is mighty interesting."

"I have gone into this rather lengthy explanation in order that you might understand how it was that when Idayah spoke to me at the time I was talking about, everything in the room rang with the vibration of her voice; and when I replied to her, the vibrations ceased—for there was nothing there to respond to the tone of my voice."

"I understand."

"Nevertheless, it was sufficient of itself to stop the vibrations that had been set in motion by hers; and that was why she called out to me to speak, that time when the train-bearers left the room while her voice was still ringing through it."

"Yes."

"Now, in a land that is one—that is, by virtue of vibration, the medium of conveying a sound is identical in sounding"

"I suppose so."

"For instance—and you must always bear in mind that it is a silent land, for silence is the law of nature and sound is the breaking of the rule—let us suppose that upon the roof of your house you have a dozen gongs. Or, to make it easier, let us say three."

"Very well."

"We will say that the sound of one of them—you are trained so that you are capable of recognizing any one of them the moment you hear it—we will say that the sound of one of them notifies you of a call to arms; that the sound of the second one calls you to worship, and that the third one proclaims the death of the ruler over the country where you live. Do you understand that?"

"Perfectly."

"Now, somewhere else in the city is the larger gongs which are used to set those gongs on your roof in vibration—in other words, to sounding."

"Yes."

"Somewhere, we will say, there is a sudden invasion of the country by the enemy. At once the person who has it in charge goes to that central point and sounds the call to arms; and instantly throughout the land every gong that is in unison with that one sounds its alarm, with the result that much more quickly than the message could be conveyed by telegraphy or by telephone every house in the country is apprised of the danger. For the sound once started travels from one locality to another and so on indefinitely.

"If the call is to worship, the result is the same. If the call is to announce the death of the ruler of the country, the result is the same, and instantly—at the very second almost, allowing for the speed with which sound travels—every family in the country knows that the king or queen is dead.

"Now, Nick, the world of which the Sacred Valley is the center and the hub is a world of gongs. Every house is provided on its roof with a succession of them; the sound of each gong is some sort of a signal. When it sounds, the person who hears it understands, and acts accordingly."

"By Jove, Starbuck, but that is great! It beats the telephone all hollow, doesn't it?"

"It does. And now I come to the point."

"Well?"

"When I struck that first gong in the room where I was, I sounded the knell of the then ruler over that land. I did not know it—I could not have known it; but I did it. When I struck it that resounding blow and sent its vibration out over that far-off land, I informed every person in that land that the king was dead.

"When, later, in my desperation, I threw the stick from me, meaning to hit the gong again that I had not struck, and struck it another and a different one, I stopped the signal as suddenly as it had begun—and in this it would appear that a strange thing had happened, for there was a prophecy which had twice before been fulfilled and which I was to fulfill for the third time."

"You know the prophecy?" asked Nick.

"Yes. I know it."

"Will you repeat it to me?"

"It is this: 'The vibration which sounds the doom of a king shall be broken by the voice of him who shall rule, through the virtue and by the grace of the daughter of the king, who shall be the goddess over all the world.'"

"But," said the detective, "I don't understand."

"I will explain," replied Starbuck. "Listen."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BALM OF ETERNAL YOUTH.

"'The vibration which sounds the doom of a king shall be broken by the voice of him who shall rule, through the virtue and by the grace of the daughter of the king, who shall be the goddess over all the world.'"

Starbuck quoted the prophecy again, slowly and solemnly, keeping his eyes fixed sharply upon the face of the detective as he did so; but when Nick remained silent, he added:

"Carter, it is true that I struck the first gong all the way down the cups, with the leather-covered hammer I found there; it is also true that the sound of that gong announced the doom of the king; it is true, too, that presently, in a rage at the sounds I had called up out of the silence, I threw the hammer from me at the gong, missed it, and perhaps hit another one, for there was another one there to hit, and afterward I found the hammer under that second gong; *but it is likewise true that as I threw that hammer I shrieked out in rage and pain at the top of my voice.*"

"Well," said Nick. "What of that?"

"This: Whether I hit the second gong with the hammer or not, it would have been sounded just the same by my voice, for my voice was in harmony with it. In other words, *it was the sound of my voice which broke the vibration which announced the doom of the king.*"

"Oh! I begin to understand. But, go on."

"The prophecy said, 'Shall be broken by him who shall rule, through the virtue and by the grace of the daughter of the king.'"

"And that meant you?"

"That meant me."

"And that was why they rushed into the room and threw blankets or rugs over your head—so that you could not utter another sound; at least, not until you were permitted to do so?"

"Precisely. You have got it."

"But why should the fact that you struck the first gong have sounded the doom of a king? Did he shoot himself, or stab himself when he heard it?"

"No. Nobody knows what caused his death. He was found seated in his chair, dead. There was nothing the matter with him at all. The probability is that he was already dead when I struck the gong, and that my doing so, as I did, was merely a coincidence. I struck it only to call somebody into the room where I was, for I wanted to know things; I wanted to know how I got there, who had bathed and dressed me, and all about my surroundings. Seeing the gong, I supposed it would be the quickest way to call attention to my wants."

"Naturally."

"And it was the doom-gong."

"Perhaps the sound of it frightened the old king to death. I suppose he was old, wasn't he?"

Starbuck smiled before he replied.

"Yes," he said, "he was very old. So old that it was time for him to die; but whether he was already dead, or if he dropped dead from fright when he heard the sound of it, can never be known. The point is that he was dead, and Idayah was his daughter."

"By Jove!"

"Do you understand me now?"

"Yes."

"Idayah's father was the king whose doom had been sounded by the vibration which I had stopped, no matter whether I did it with my voice or with the leather-covered hammer that I afterward hurled across the room—the dome-room in the tower of the palace, for that is what it was."

"So, it was up to you to fulfil the prophecy, eh?"

"There wasn't any question about that. I was n't given a choice about it."

"In a word, you had to marry the goddess."

"In a word, I *did* marry the goddess."

"So that at the present moment, Idayah is your wife."

"Idayah is my wife—yes."

The detective uttered a low whistle.

"I'll get back to that in a minute, Starbuck; but tell me first, was not it rather careless on their parts to leave you alone in the room with that doom-gong?"

"That room is what is called the Dome-room of the palace, Nick. There are about four hundred gongs there, any one of which I might have struck. It was because I was expected to strike one of them, or to start one of them to vibrating by the sound of my voice, calling out, that I was left there. My own fate was to be determined in that way. It was the fulfilment of their prophecy that I should have struck the doom-gong and then stilled it, or rather, broken the vibration, almost at once."

"I see. You were a creature of circumstance."

"Or the mere tool of fate. You and I both know that my getting lost in the first place, followed by my wandering into that valley, and the resultant incidents, were all merely incidents; nothing else. But you could not make one of those people believe that I was not born into the world thirty years ago for that very purpose. It makes no difference that I was born here in America and had never heard of their Sacred Valley; it made no difference that I had a passion for hunting big game, and that my taste took me into those wilds; it made no difference that it was perfectly natural that I should get lost, and seeing houses that were inhabited by human beings should go to them in search of help; it made no difference that I should have been fatigued to the point of dropping dead among them when I made my appearance, or that the striking of the gong and the things that followed should have been accidents. They did not and do not view it so."

"They believed and still believe that you were sent there."

"They believe that I was the fulfilment of the prophecy."

"Well, you found a beautiful bride, even if she is a little bit careless about the taking of human life."

"That is the result of her teaching."

"I suppose so."

"But I have not begun to tell you of the wonders of that valley yet, Nick."

"I suppose not. Let us get back to that interview—that first interview you had with Idayah. This is too good to skip anything. I wish to hear it all."

"Little by little she told me all that I have told to you."

"You haven't told me yet how it happened that she could talk English. That seems rather remarkable to me, taking into consideration the other surroundings of the place."

"She spoke—she speaks all languages. We will come to that as I relate the conversation that took place between us."

"Very good. Relate it."

"Then go back with me in your thoughts to that moment."

"Yes."

"Forget, for the time being, all that I have already explained to you. Consider yourself, for this telling, as ignorant as I was. Remember that I had no idea where I was. I had no idea what had happened. I did not know anything about those people. I had heard about them vaguely, that is all. I had heard of the Sacred Valley only as a place from which no traveler returned. That was all I knew about it; but I did suspect that that was the place into which I had fallen. Remember also that I was half-startled out of my senses by what had already occurred."

"Yes."

"First, I had lost consciousness, to awaken and find myself in a strange and palatial room, robed in garments which in value were equal to a king's ransom. Then I was dismayed by my surroundings. Next, I was startled almost to insanity by the din I had created by the mere striking of what looked to me to be a Japanese gong; and finally, I was hustled from the room by powerful men who nearly smothered me with rugs and blankets, and they were in turn removed from my head to disclose the fact that I was standing in the presence of the most beautiful and bewitching, and awe-inspiring woman I had ever seen."

"It was rather a bunch of incidents, wasn't it?"

"Remember also that each time she spoke a word, the whole room rang with the vibrations of her voice. I don't wish to be understood as saying that her voice was loud. On the contrary, it was soft and low and sweet; but there followed after it always those vibrations which would only cease when I replied to her."

"Even the voice of a beautiful woman might pall upon one under those circumstances," mused the detective aloud. "But go on. I do not want to be facetious. But you must understand that this is all new to me, and interesting in its character. That I think I am capable of having been a poking fool at times occasionally."

"I don't mind. I am relieved by telling you about it."

"And now let us hear that conversation. That first conversation between you and—"

"She began by asking me if I knew what I had done; and I replied that I had done nothing at all more than to seek succor of the people whom I was led to believe lived in the valley that I had discovered lying almost at my feet when I came through the pass in the mountains. I told her in detail about my traveling-companions, from whom I had become lost; I told her of my wanderings through the mountain passes for several days in the effort to find my way again to civilization; I told her how I had discovered the beaten path of the trail that I had followed, and how it had led me to the valley and finally to her presence.

"And lastly, I explained to her how, awaking alone in that gorgeous room, I had not known where I was or with what manner of people I was concerned, and in an effort to summon some person to me whom I could question, I had struck the gong with the hammer.

"'But there was no hammer there,' she said.

"I assured her that there had been a hammer there; a leather-covered hammer, purposely fashioned for striking the gong, I supposed.

"'But there was no hammer there,' she repeated with a smile; and disliking at that particular stage of the game to contradict her, I bowed and said nothing more on the point.

"'And the other gong?' she asked me then. 'The breaking of the vibration? What of that?'

"I explained then how, in my desperation, I had thrown the hammer I had used at the gong, and that I believed I had shouted aloud and sworn at it at the same time, for it seemed to be filling the room and all the earth with its vibrations; and she nodded her head wisely and replied:

"'You hit nothing with your hammer. It was your voice that broke the other sound-waves.'

"Again I bowed my head, preferring to admit that she was correct, to insisting that it had happened in any [illegible] I had [illegible] to happen."

The detective chuckled audibly.

"She was a wise woman, even then," he said. "She might have been born and reared and have lived all the days of her few years"—Starbuck smiled here—"in that benighted, God-forsaken, lost, forgotten country, but all the same she was wise in her generation. She saw before her a handsome young man"—Starbuck bowed mockingly—"she was wise to the fact that her people would accept the idea that it was the fulfilment of the

"I prophecy, and so she insisted that the gong had not been struck with the hammer, but had sounded of its own volition to proclaim the death of the king, and that in order that she might be ruler."

"If you mean by that, Nick, that she had murdered her father——"

"Oh, I don't mean that. What I do mean is that she was quite willing to accept conditions as they were, and to make the most of them. I expect that the remainder of your story will carry out that idea, too. But what next?"

"Next, she came still closer to me, and, reaching out one hand, she smiled and touched me on the forehead. Then she said:

"'The Supreme Ruler of the Universe, whom I serve, has sent you here to fulfil a destiny of which I am the other part—the other half. If you will but accept your fate without a struggle or an objection, the gods who rule over us will be pleased, and your whole life will be espoused in a happiness that is infinite. And more than that, *I will give you the balm of eternal youth. The balm of eternal youth!*'"

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAKING OF A KING.

After a moment, Starbuck continued:

"Then, Nick, might be said to be the very first time that I ever felt the strange power of Idayah. It was when she touched me."

"It is hypnotic power," replied Nick. "I knew that she possessed it the first time that I came in contact with her. But go on."

"It is something more than mere hypnotic power, Carter. I know it is. I will admit that she does make use of that influence which we call hypnotism, but I know that there are accessories that she makes use of with it. Such, for instance, as the drugs she uses."

"Tell me something about those drugs."

"I can tell you nothing since I know nothing; that is, nothing more than the mere effect of many of them."

"Well, tell me of that."

"For example, she can make you sleep for an hour, or a day or a month or—she says—for a year, at will. She can do it, too, with the prick of a needle, or by causing you to inhale a pellet. She can paralyze your energies and leave your mind perfectly free to act as it always does; or she can paralyze your mind and leave the muscles free to act. She can make you thrice strong, or as weak as a kitten. In a word, by the mere use of her mixtures, she can perform miracles which would astound you."

The detective shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Well," he said, "let us get back to the great room in which you were alone together."

Starbuck was silent for a moment, and then he said:

"She had just told me that she could give me the balm of eternal youth. I could not fail to understand the significance of her utterances, coupled as they were with the death of the king and with the prophecy that accompanied that circumstance."

"In a word, she meant that you should be her husband, and you knew what she meant."

"Yes."

"How did the suggestion strike you at the moment?"

Starbuck actually blushed under the detective's concentrated gaze; then he replied:

"Nick, I am a man. I was a man then—and three years younger than I am now; something more than three years in fact, for, to be exact as to time, it is nearer four years since the happening of the events I am describing."

"Well?"

"I was a man, young, robust, full of the spirit of adventure. I had gone to India and the surrounding countries in search of adventure. There are two things in the realm of creation which always attracted me."

"A horse and a woman," said the detective with a laugh.

"Yes; a horse and a woman—although I don't know why you have placed the horse first on the list."

"In order to give the second one the greater emphasis."

"Oh!"

"You have not finished telling me yet how the suggestion that she should become your bride struck you."

"I was telling you when you interrupted me. It struck me all in a heap at first, and yet it was not unpleasant to contemplate. I was perfectly willing to admit to myself that I had never before encountered a woman as beautiful as she was. And added to her beauty were other attractions which were inspiring. I rather liked the idea, I suppose."

"Believing, of course, that you could get out of it at any moment you chose to do so, by simply making your way out of the valley and to the sea-coast, and so on, to your home in America?"

"No, Nick, you wrong me there. If I thought of that question at all at the time—and I suppose I did—that thought was that when I should tire of my surrounding, I could take her out of the country with me. I will admit that I thought even then of the pride I would feel in exhibiting her here, at——"

"At the horse show, for instance."

"Confound you, yes! If you will have it so. It would be folly for me to say that I loved her—then! But I was attracted, of course. She was beautiful. She was a woman I could be proud of. She would take all the blue ribbons——"

The detective laughed outright.

"I told you so. It was your pride of possession that was touched; not your heart."

"We will say that, if you like, for the moment. But whatever the sensation was at that time, it speedily became love, for within a week I was as deeply in love as a man ever was, in history."

"You are getting ahead of your story, Starbuck."

"Well, you see, Nick, when she referred in the way she did to that baby of eternal life, I regarded it merely as a figure of speech, or rather a joke——"

"I suppose so. It was meant to be."

"No."

"What then?"

"She meant almost literally what she said. For example, the man in another part of that palace who was just dead, and whose death-knell I had rung out to the world—their world—had reigned over them for centuries—centuries!"

"Oh, come, Starbuck——"

"I do not ask you to believe me. I only tell you to know that I believe—now. I tell you——"

"Yes, I know. I only wish you to know that I believe: I only wish you to know that I believe."

"Very well."

"In starting, I will remind you of something that I said in reference to their electrical knowledge. I told you that they took their electricity out of the atmosphere; I told you that in that far-away land it is known what electricity——"

"Yes."

"I told you that they had discovered that electricity is the universal life-energy of life. That if God will you that he is manifested to us in——"

"No."

"The application of the electrical forces, as they understand them and as we may not understand them even in centuries more of progression—the application of it to their lives by the secret process they know—that Idayah knows about—gives them what we call eternal youth. I looked upon the corpse of that old king—that king who had reigned over his people for centuries, as I have said, and I give you my word that he did not look older than I do now. And yet, he was Idayah's father, and he had lived there in that palace——"

"Enough of that. I will accept all of that when I have to. It is sufficient for the present that I am willing to believe that you believe it. It is not necessary that I should do so."

"No. It is not."

"So, get back to that love-scene."

"I have already told you that when she touched me on the forehead, it was the first time that I had felt the force of the magic power with which she swayed all who were around her, or near her."

"Yes."

"The moment she touched me, my sensations were the same as those which affect one when one steps from darkness into sunshine. I was dazzled. If Idayah had been beautiful to my senses before that instant, she became thrice—nay, tenfold more beautiful with that touch against my forehead."

"That isn't electricity; it is magnetism."

"And she knew it."

"Of course she knew it. She knew more. She knew and understood the mental reservation in my mind by which I promised myself that some day I would leave the valley and take her away with me, for she smiled into my eyes and smiled them so into mine that there was nothing else for me to do but to put my arms around her——"

"Of course not. You would have been a bally fool if you hadn't; eh?"

"And she said to me:

"'It must be forever, my king. Perhaps, some day, we may go out into your world together, but it will be only for a little while. Here must be your home; here you must live for the remainder of your days, and here you must pass by my side, at least the next three years—that is, what you call years in your world.'

"I wouldn't have cared, just then, if it had been three thousand years that she was talking about. She was

next to me; close to me. She was touching me. Her arms were around my neck. My arms were around her. Her lips were touching mine. She was beautiful. Her eyes limpid and flashing at the same time. Her emotions were as great as mine. There wasn't any other world than that, just then, for she was all the world to me.

"I do not know that the lights went out. They seemed to do so. I suppose that I merely closed my eyes, or that I half-lost consciousness in the deliciousness of that moment."

Starbuck was silent for a moment, and the detective did not speak; presently the story was continued:

"I have told you to try to think of my references to myself as of a third person. I am telling you a love-story, and in telling it I place myself back again into that moment of my life, and I conjure up all the emotions that I felt then."

Nick made no comment, and he continued:

'Suddenly the lights glared up again around us. It seemed to me that years had passed since the moment when I entered that room; and, on the other hand, it seemed like only an instant of time. I was conscious of only one thing, and that was that I no longer had any desire ever to leave that country, that palace—or her.

"My world had narrowed around me until it was shut in by the walls of the room where she was. Can I put it stronger than that?"

"No; it isn't necessary."

"There had been a long period of silence between us; but now, as the lights flashed up again, she looked at me with a smile and whispered:

"'Come with me, my lord.'

"I went with her. She took me by the hand and led the way for, having gathered the train of her robe so that it hung suspended across her left arm.

"We passed through doors which opened before us as if with unseen hands as we approached them, and closed again behind us in the same manner. Afterward I learned that it was done by another application of that universal force, but at the time it impressed me as nothing less than magic.

"We passed from that great room, which was called the audience chamber, into another room, and then, after going a great many, about a dozen I should say, we had traversed the length of the palace building, and there, at the end of the corridor, another door opened on all sides, and I was beyond it, this time, outside the walls of the palace, and in the open air. I found myself in a garden, and I knew that I was in Idaho-land, as I afterward discovered—were gathered in that room.

"Into it the body of the dead king had been borne. He was laid out in state, already, in the center of the room, and around the bier were grouped the men I had mentioned.

"Idayah whispered to me as we passed through the doorway, and while it was closing behind us:

"'Go forward when I stop. Stand at the dead king's head. Touch him upon the forehead, and then, with your fingers pressed there, turn your gaze from one face to another in this room until you have encountered the eyes of everybody who is present here, save only me. Now!'"

She halted, and I stepped forward to do her bidding.

CHAPTER X.

THE PLAYTHING OF FATE.

"I did exactly as she had told me to do," continued Starbuck. "I passed to the head of the corpse and touched the dead king on the brow with the index finger of my right hand; and then I raised my head and my eyes and slowly, one after another, met the eyes and the gaze of every person in that lofty room.

"I encountered only sullen looks; but I noticed that each one quailed as I encountered it. Here and there I saw a scowl; now and then there was a sycophantic smile; everywhere there seemed to be fear.

"Then I did another and a strange thing—and it seemed that I did the right thing, too; but whether it was an impulse of my own, or if Idayah willed me to do it, I cannot say.

"When I had encountered the last pair of eyes in that room, I turned back again to the dead man beside me, and, dropping upon one knee beside the corpse, I remained there for perhaps a minute; and then I rose and returned to Idayah's side.

"I want you to know that during all that time there was not a sound spoken, and as there is sound of any kind in that room. Surrounding us was a deathly silence that was oppressive; but when I approached Idayah to resume my place at her side, I encountered her eyes [illegible] and they seemed to say to me as plainly as words could have done it:

"'Speak! Say something! Anything!'

"You must know that I was in a quandary. I did not know what to say. I doubted if any one in that room

save Idayah herself would understand me if I did speak, no matter in what language I should utter words. I remained silent, and she pinched my arm with a severity which almost made me cry out.

"But the pinch gave me inspiration. What would you have done under those circumstances, Nick?"

"Search me! I give it up, Starbuck. What did you do?"

"I suddenly remembered two things. I recalled the fact that every voice that made a sound started bells to ringing somewhere; that is, every voice started into existence some kind of vibratory motion, and I believed that Idayah knew that my voice would do so, and that it was expected of me by the others. The other thing that I remembered was that once, long ago, I heard an elocutionist named Roberts recite Poe's 'Bells,' and that in doing so he imitated the droning of a bell to perfection.

"You know that I have rather a resonant baritone voice? Well, I opened my mouth and sang out with all the power of my lungs, the word 'Bell-l-ls!' holding the sound of it upon my voice as long a time as my breath would permit.

"Bells!" I sang; and the result was startling.

"The room resounded with a crash of bells as if a thousand of them had suddenly became alive at once. It was deafening. The sounds, or, rather, the vibration, traveled outside the room and it set other bells to going, far and near, until the world seemed to be alive with the ringing of bells.

"I turned to Idayah with a startled look, but she was gazing smilingly upon me, evidently well pleased by what I had done.

"You may believe it or not, but after a little, those vibrations became so terrible that the walls of the palace trembled under them; the building swayed as if with the oscillation that comes after the shock of an earthquake; and then, when it seemed as if there was danger that it would fall into ruins about our ears, the voice of Idayah broke the spell in the same wondrous way that other one had been broken, when I awakened alone in the room in the tower.

"To my amazement, she called out the same word that I had used, intoning it exactly as I had done; holding it as I had done; for striking another key—and after a moment the vibrating motion of the walls of the building ceased, the din subsided, and only the faint echoes of what had been came to us across the distance, dying gradually away until once again that same deathlike silence reigned around us.

"Then, and again to my amazement—to my utter amazement—the first one of the twenty men who were present in the room with us took up the refrain."

"Bells, again?" asked Nick.

"Yes. Don't you see that they were only copying me? Only using the sound that I had used to indicate the fact that they had accepted me?"

"I begin to understand. It was not that you had hit upon the right word, but that they would have made use of the same word you did, no matter what it might have been."

"Exactly. The first one called out bells as I had done, and as Idayah had done. When the vibrations of his voice started, the second one repeated it; then the third; and so on along, or rather around the entire circle, until every one of them had cried out that same word that I had used.

"It was their proclamation that I was accepted as their king; it was their recognition of my power over them, conferred upon me by the fulfilment of the prophecy.

"My cry to them, which had started the vibrations which shook the building, was an assertion of my supposed rights; Idayah's cry of the same word was her acceptance of me as king and as her lord and master, her husband; and when the men took up the cry and repeated it, one after another, the vibrations produced by their voices went out over the land, proclaiming to all that a new king reigned; that the goddess had become the queen."

"I must say that they lost no time about it all," said Nick, with a smile.

"Nor with anything. That same afternoon—I have forgotten to tell you that since my awakening in the room where I was alone, when it was dark, the morning had come, the sun had risen, and a new day was upon us—that same afternoon Idayah and I went through the ceremony of marriage according to their rites and laws."

"Didn't it strike you that you were crowding considerable history into something less than a day, Starbuck?"

"It did; and the objectionable feature of it all was that I acted through it all as a man who is blindfolded. I had not another opportunity for exchanging a word with Idayah, who might have posted me on what was expected of me, or required of me.

"But there was no opportunity for that.

"When we passed from the room where the dead king

— laid out, we entered another one, as large, where a bevy of women awaited us.

"As we entered, they took up that cry of 'Bells' and passed it from mouth to mouth as their husbands had done, and when it had passed around, and they had again bowed Idayah and me in turn, lowered their knees, joined our hands and placed our hands upon their own heads for a moment, they quickly—the women did—took Idayah away from me, and left me in the room with the men.

"Fortunately, I remembered that it was a country of dances. I did not speak; quite as fortunately, nobody thought it necessary to speak to me. Afterward I discovered that it was against the law for one of them to address me unless he was first spoken to.

"But they did indulge among themselves, in that sign-talk that I have mentioned; and quite as fortunately, I even thought it interesting, while staying out in the Indian Territory, to learn the sign-talk.

"It may surprise you to know that the sign-talk in that palace, contrary to advice precisely the same as the sign-talk among our own Indians; but it is no more surprising that the pyramids of Central America should be practically the same as the pyramids of Egypt.

"I saw them talking among themselves, in the sign-talk, and he quickly caught onto the fact that I could read most all of it; and from reading what they said to one another, I understood what was expected of me.

"It was not strange, therefore, that I was able largely to anticipate them in their wishes regarding me.

"I need not tell you about the details of that day, Nick.

"It will be enough to tell you that first I was led to a room which could give the points hacks of the Romans of three-card cards and spades.

"I was bathed, and rubbed, anointed and perfumed, until I was sick of it. I was conducted to a part of the palace which was to be my home. I was shown a wardrobe which would have given Berry Wall heart disease on the instant. I was arrayed in one of the costumes. I was conducted to the court-yard of the palace—and there I saw the prettiest sight next to Idayah herself, that I have ever seen before or since."

"What was it?"

"I mean—one of the most beautiful horses you ever saw in your life, and the most beautiful one of all was for me.

"We mounted and we were off. I guessed it was a ride to exhibit me to the people of the city, and it was so. It was a sort of exhibition day all around.

"At noon—I judged it to be noon by the position of the sun—I was taken to the front of the palace, that palace, by the way, resembled one of our own capitol buildings at Washington, and there in front of the building had been erected a commodious platform; and there, for the first time since we arrived in the town where the women took her away from me, I met Idayah again.

"She was awaiting me, and she was arrayed in robes so rich that I cannot describe them; in jewels of which there cannot be the like elsewhere in all the world; and in a beauty which is all her own.

"She was ten times more beautiful than ever, now, and when she smiled upon me my heart almost stopped beating in my emotion. I considered you—will not then, if through losing it I owned her.

"Talk about a marriage ceremony! There were priestly men there by the hundreds, arrayed in priestly robes, with priestly countenances.

"When they ceased over us bells rang throughout the city, started to ringing by the vibrations of the voices of the priests. When we uttered our answers—and Idayah preceded me in that—other chimes started to ring, and then there was a chorus of boys and another of girls, and these chimed in, so that after a little the whole land seemed to ring with the harmony of it.

"It was only a quartet of sounds, although it seemed to be produced by the pealing of millions of bells, but it was the most awe-inspiring ceremony that your imagination could conjure up.

"And so we were married.

"Afterward, the people filed past us by thousands. Now and then there would be one who would step from a group, press forward, bow the adoring knee, kiss our hands or the hem of our robes, place our hands for a moment upon his head, and then retire again to the group.

"And so it went on hour after hour, until the sun had dropped behind the mountains, until evening was upon us, and the palace was alight for our reception.

"And the evening was no better.

"We returned to the palace to a banquet at which there were thousands seated together—and for once the walls were shut in so that no sound could escape outside, and for once everybody talked at his or her lover's command, with no fear of setting those vibrations going to ring

down buildings and to destroy the world; for I will confess that they were always terrifying to me; are so still.

"After that, there was the ball-room. There was dancing.

"Not as we understand dancing, for we were only spectators—that is, the guests at the ball were spectators. The dancing was done by professionals, for there it is a profession."

"It strikes me," said Nick, "that the whole outfit was rather glad about the death of the old king."

"Ah!" replied Starbuck. "There is a land where death does not bring sorrow—where it brings joy. Where it is known to what joys the dead have passed. It is a season of rejoicing. Their joy was for the freedom of their former king, and for the beginning of the reign of their goddess and her consort—the new king."

CHAPTER XI.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE SACRED VALLEY.

"Now, Nick, my story is almost completed save for replying to such questions as you will wish to ask me. I have only a little more to add to what I have already told you.

"The celebration of the marriage festivities were not over until midnight, and they had continued all that day, as you know. It was a mystery to me how I kept up, considering what I had passed through so short a time before, when I was lost in the mountains, and when I had dropped down at the feet of the people I met at the entrance to the valley, exhausted by fatigue.

"But I found out, to my astonishment, that I had been more than a week in that room where I awakened, sleeping and resting and getting nourishment from the drugs that were administered to me, and waited upon by servants who had been especially appointed for the purpose—for to tell you the truth, Idapah had selected me for the fulfilment of that prophecy the first moment she saw me."

"And," said the detective, "I have no doubt that she placed that hammer under the gong in order that you would discover and use it, to fulfil the prophecy."

"Yes. She confessed to that, later on.

"During the days, and weeks and months that followed, I found that everything that is done in that country is performed through the agency of electricity. Save only that one other source of power, vibration.

"But you will be surprised to know that vibration is itself only another form of electric power. They know how to time electrical forces, as we would time a clock. Their principal metal for mechanics is aluminum, and another which is even lighter in weight. Their flying machines——"

"Ah! There you have struck something that I wish to know more about."

"I can tell you little more than I have already said on that subject, save that they solved the problem of flight through the air so many years ago that it is as old a story to them now as is our vehicle that goes on wheels.

"The principal secret of the success of their air-ships is in the gas they use, and in the correctness of construction. They do not use a balloon-shaped contrivance at all. In fact, they use no contrivance on the lighter-than-air principle; but rather is it an offset to the attraction of gravitation.

"Their flying machines are made rather in the form of birds. It is provided with compartments, which in a boat we would call air-chambers. Their compartments are filled with the gas I have mentioned, and it is compressed. Their motors are operated by electricity, and, since they draw the electricity from the atmosphere, there are no heavy and weighty contrivances necessary.

"Given one of their suits, which I described as suggesting the swimming suit of Boynton, one has only to add to that the apparatus for flying, which is merely the wings and the motor, to skim over the earth and above the lesser mountain peaks at will. I have seen them go out in flocks, like enormous birds, flying through the air like pigeons; and they have not only those individual machines, which every one there possesses, like bicycles here, but there are other and larger machines, some of which will carry eight or ten persons. The largest I ever saw carried twelve."

"That is a good story, Starbuck. I can only say that I would like to see a flock of birds of the kind that you describe."

"To return to the time that followed the ceremony."

"Yes."

"I was perfectly content there. I loved my wife, for wife she was. There could have been no ceremony more solemn than that which united us."

"I should say not."

"We journeyed over-th [illegible] together, from [illegible] of it to another, and when I tell you that in every re-

I could figure it, it is about five hundred miles in diameter, you will understand how vast it is."

"Yes."

"We spent months in that manner. Sight-seeing you would call it here——"

"How long a time did you remain there altogether?" asked the detective.

"A year to a day, Nick."

"And how did you get away when you came away at last?"

"With one of the flying machines; in the night."

"So! You have had your turn at that, have you?"

"Yes."

"Why did you come away at all? Why did you not remain there? Why are you not there even now? Did you tire of your wife, who was a goddess?"

"There are four questions in one. I will answer the last one first. No; I did not tire of my wife; not at all."

"What then?"

"I got homesick! I longed for a sight of Broadway. I wanted to see a horse show again, I suppose."

"You are coming down now from the sublime to the ridiculous."

"I am telling you the mere truth, and nothing but the truth. I was homesick for little old New York; nothing less, nothing more."

"But why did you not tell Idayah all about that?"

"I did tell her all about it. I besought her to come away with me. I promised her that we would return there after a little. I argued that she could appoint a regent to fill her place during her absence, for she was the real ruler, as you have guessed; I was not."

The detective nodded.

"She would not hear of it—for the time. She said she could not. She said that it was a law of her country that a new ruler must remain within sight of the palace—that is to say, within the valley—for three years from the day of the assumption of the crown. She insisted that we must remain there together for the three years, and that after that she would travel over the world with me, on the condition that we would only be absent a few months at a time.

"For a time I was satisfied with that. But I became restless. I wanted to get away. The magnet that is in the pavement of Broadway was beckoning to me. I felt that I had to go. I approached her again on the subject."

"Well?"

"This time I besought her to let me go away without her, on my promise to return after six months."

"And she said nay, nay, Pauline, eh?"

"She said something stronger than that. She said that it was impossible. She said, in a word, that I could not go away. She assumed what had before been concealed under a glove of velvet; she assumed the strong hand, the hand of the ruler, and I knew myself at last for what I was; not a king, but merely the husband of a——"

"Goddess," said Nick.

"Of a queen. Of a goddess. Yes. During that year a native of the surrounding country wandered into the valley, and he was put to death. I did not like that. I liked less the method of his execution. I began to see myself in the same predicament some day, for I knew that among the nobles there were those who suspected me for what I was—an impostor."

"Tell me how that man was killed. You say you did not like the method of it."

"He was put to death by those damnable vibrations."

"Eh? *What!*"

"It is true. There is an execution house there where they do that sort of thing. It must be horrible. I know that I experienced the beginning of it that time in the room in the tower, and that was enough."

"How did it kill him?"

"I cannot tell you that. I can only tell you how he looked after he was dead."

"Well?"

"He had been bound and gagged so that he could not make a sound to protect himself, for had he been left the freedom of motion and of sound he could have laughed at their efforts to kill him in that manner, you know. Afterward, when I saw him, after the execution, his appearance was that of a person who had died in agony. His face was a jellylike pulp from which no blood had flown. It is indescribable."

"And inconceivable as well, Starbuck."

"Nevertheless it is true."

"Now tell me how you did get away at last."

"I came on the flying machine which Idayah used for her own. I started as soon as it was dark one night. You must know—I don't think I have told you—that the apparatus for their air-ships is made of a filmy substance, the like of which I have never seen elsewhere in the world. It is opaque, like fog; it is—if you will admit of a paradox—transparent, like a thin fog. It is so tight that it will hold gas. It is so light in weight that a bolt

of it that would measure a hundred yards in extent would not weigh more than a pound. In color, it is nondescript, for it seems to have the quality of the chameleon—it seems to be able to take upon itself, by refraction, possibly, the color of surrounding objects. I will pledge you my word that even in the daylight, at a distance of several hundred feet, it is almost impossible to see one of them in the air—that is, more than the mere outlines."

"And you took Idayah's flying machine. Why hers? Why not your own?"

"I knew that I should be missed. I knew that it would not occur to her that I had taken her flying machine. She might look for mine and find it where it belonged. In the afternoon I rode my horse away from the palace, and I gave the horse to a man and sent him on a supposed errand to the other end of the valley. Then I returned secretly to the palace."

"And flew away, eh?"

"And flew away, literally. I knew the general direction that I should take. I crossed the mountain just above the pass by which I had entered the valley. I had found my own clothing and I took it with me. As soon as I reached a place [illegible] where there was a railway, which I did the following morning, I alighted; I dressed in my own clothes; I set fire to the flying machine, and when it was destroyed I made my way into the Indian city, and thence home."

"And did you never regret it?"

"I have regretted it always."

"Have you never thought of returning there?"

"I have thought of it always."

"Why have you not returned?"

"Because I have felt that once I was back there again the people would put me to death as they did that poor chap that I have described."

"And have you not felt that Idayah would sometime come after you?"

"I have felt assured that she would; but I knew that she could not do so until the three years of her novitiate as queen should have elapsed. Since that did elapse—and I have been aware of the [illegible] I have [illegible] daily. You know when she came."

"And now she insists that you shall return with her?"

"Yes."

"To your death, or to life with her?"

"[illegible] She will not assure me of [illegible]"

"Is it certain that she still loves you, Starbuck?"

"Yes."

"Is it equally certain that you love her?" asked Nick quietly.

Starbuck started to his feet.

"Certain that I love her?" he cried out. "My God! I——"

He paused without completing the sentence; paused with his mouth agape and with his eyes fixed staringly upon something which was behind Nick Carter.

CHAPTER XII.

THE COMING OF IDAYAH.

You, reader, who have followed Starbuck's relation of his remarkable adventure, will remember some of the conditions which led up to the telling of it.

You will recall the fact that Nick Carter, before he closeted himself in the study with Starbuck, gave particular directions that Chick was not to leave the house; that Joseph was to remain on guard at the front door, and also the other precautions which were taken against the possibility of interruption.

You will remember, also, that Nick, upon entering his study with Starbuck, had closed the door after him. He had intended to lock it, but having turned the key in the door to do so, the absurdity of the procedure had struck him forcibly, and he had turned the key back again, thus leaving the door unlocked.

And during the recital of the story, strange and wonderful as the things had been that were related by Starbuck, he had become so absorbed that he had totally forgotten the door, and also the conditions that existed outside the door, to guard them against interruptions.

For while Nick Carter accepted everything that Starbuck told him as truth, he accepted them all also as truths only so far as Starbuck was himself concerned.

That is, he gave his friend the credit of telling what he himself believed to be the absolute truth, while Nick, in his own mind, held many mental reservations [illegible] all of which he kept to himself.

The fact that [illegible] had succeeded in making a flying machine that would fly was not difficult of belief, since it was true that here in our own country the feat was practically accomplished. It was not strange that [illegible] should have [illegible] the Wright Brothers, of Boston.

But now, when he asked that last question of Starbuck; when he asked him if he still loved the goddess-queen who was his wife, as certainly as if they had been wedded in the Little Church Around the Corner—and when Starbuck paused suddenly in the middle of his reply, and stared past the detective as he had done once before since the subject of Idayah had been brought to Nick Carter's notice, he remembered all the precautions that had been taken against interruption; he recalled all the fears of interruption and its consequences that had been expressed by Starbuck, and somehow, in that instant, he knew as well as Starbuck, who could see what he was staring at, what it was that had caused the interruption.

He knew that Idayah had entered the room and was standing behind him.

He recalled instantly that other occasion at the Garden, when Starbuck had extorted a promise from him not to move; when Idayah had stood behind him with one of the poisoned darts ready to use, and would have killed him had he turned, and he had no doubt that this occasion was a repetition of that one, and that the dart was already poised to take his life should he dare to turn.

Men will think rapidly under circumstances such as this was.

Fortunately, at the instant when the interruption came, Nick Carter was leaning forward in the act of brushing the ash from his cigar and he was, therefore, in a position to move quickly without first having to gather himself to do so.

And he did move, with a suddenness of which only Nick Carter was capable, and himself only under the stress of great necessity.

That wild-eyed stare of Starbuck's warned him, and he jumped: also he sprang directly forward, full against Starbuck, who was seated a little distance away in front of him; and in striking against him he managed to overturn him upon the floor, chair and all, himself alighting upon his hands and knees, and then bounding to his feet again, sideways.

It was a feat which only a practised athlete could have performed: but Nick Carter did it; and as he gained his feet and stood upright, he felt a breath of air upon his cheek, a soft substance touched against it, and one of the darts which have already been described buried its deadly point in the framing of the book-case, and hung there, quivering as if with rage at the failure of its mission.

And the right hand of the detective flew out almost instinctively, the weapon which he had in his sleeve appeared in his grasp as if by magic, and the muzzle of it covered the heart of the woman who had tried to kill him.

But she seemed to be totally unmindful of that; entirely careless of the fact that death threatened her quite as emphatically as it had threatened the detective a moment ago, for she was smiling into Nick Carter's eyes, her gaze was unruffled, she seemed unmoved, indifferent, contemptuous.

Idayah she was, too, in all her wondrous beauty—in all the power of her matchless fascinations; and perceiving that she paid no heed to his weapon, Nick allowed it to slip again into his sleeve out of sight.

For a moment, nobody spoke at all.

In the interest that Nick felt at the interruption, he forgot to look toward Starbuck. Had he done so, he would have seen that the New Yorker remained where he had fallen; that he made no attempt to arise; in fact that he appeared to be bereft of the power to move.

And while that silence lasted, Idayah continued to gaze silently into Nick Carter's eyes, and he was conscious of the fact that he began to feel the spell of her presence creeping upon him.

He told himself vaguely in that moment that there was certainly something mysterious about this woman; something to be dreaded—something to be loved also, he did not doubt, since he had heard the story of Starbuck.

With the consciousness that he was beginning to feel that thrill of power which she so mysteriously exerted over all who came in contact with her, came also the determination to resist it to the utmost, and he threw back his head and straightened his shoulders, while he smiled back into her eyes as calmly as she did it; and he said coolly:

"I suppose, Idayah, that you intended to kill me with that little dart of yours; eh?"

"No," she replied as calmly as he had spoken. "It would not have injured you, more than the prick of a pin would do so. It would have put you to sleep—to sleep—and in an hour from now you would have been——"

She stopped and Nick waited; but when she did not continue what she was saying but only smiled upon him, he asked:

"I would have been—where?"

"Somewhere in the air with my husband and I: somewhere in the air, flying through space, back again toward

that wonderful land about which you have been told, where I would have taken you—and him."

"And now—eh?—you have changed your mind about taking me there? And him also?" smiled the detective at her.

"No. Not necessarily."

"I think you have. I think you have given it up as a bad job."

She only smiled her reply. She made no answer in words.

"I think," continued the detective, "that you have come here to give yourself up in order that I may return you to the prison from which you escaped; for you did walk out of it after you had blinded the eyes of your jailer with your mysterious powder—or with your wonderful eyes; which was it?"

Still she smiled upon him. Still she did not reply.

"That habit of silence which obtains among your countrymen and concerning which Starbuck has had considerable to say," continued the detective, "is trying at times. I would be glad if you would reply to me, Idayah."

"And how would you have me reply, sir?"

"As you will. Tell me first why you are here?"

"I came—for him"; and she raised one hand and pointed a finger at the prostrate figure on the floor, which Nick now noticed for the first time.

Without a thought of the consequences and in his concern for Starbuck, Nick turned quickly toward his friend, and so exposed his back to Idayah.

It all happened in an instant, then.

He was conscious as he turned that he had made a mistake, and he sought to turn back again, but even though only the fraction of an instant had elapsed, it was too late.

Something struck him in the nape of the neck; he was conscious of a sharp pain, as if a pin had been driven into his flesh, and he would have sunk upon the floor had not strong, firm hands seized him and guided him to a chair.

He knew that it was Idayah who had seized upon him and helped him. His brain was as active as ever, and he remembered now one thing that Starbuck had told him: That Idayah possessed drugs with which she could steal away the power of the muscles without impairing the action of the functions of the brain.

That was what she had done to him; and now she could use him as willing.

He tried to speak and found that it was impossible. He could not utter a sound; but he could hear, and she was talking to him.

"My machine is large enough," she was saying. "Two shall return with me to the Sacred Valley instead of one, and you, Nick Carter, shall be taught the power of Idayah and her people."

She turned from him toward Starbuck and ordered him to arise; and to Nick's amazement, the man who had seemed to be incapable of motion obeyed her. He rose, and with bowed head followed her through the door into the hall, and was gone; but Idayah looked back over her shoulder as she went, and said:

"In a moment I will return for you."

It seemed a long moment to the detective, but presently she was back again; and she came close to him and stretched out her hand, resting it upon his head.

And at that instant Nick heard the sound of feet rapidly ascending the stairs. He heard Chick's voice shouting to him. He saw Idayah start away from him and flit through the doorway as if she were on wings of silence herself. He heard exclamations of dismay from Chick, and made by other voices, and he felt another sting against his cheek.

After that, he remembered nothing.

It was almost a week later when Nick Carter awoke to full consciousness, and he was told then that Idayah had made her escape and that she had taken Starbuck with her.

Chick had come upon the scene just in time to see her running toward the stairs which led to the roof of the house, but she had turned long enough to throw a powder into their eyes which had blinded him and the others; and when at last they did reach the roof, there was nothing there.

And Nick, having listened to the story, said:

"Get me well, Chick, for I am going to Nepal. That is where Idayah has taken Starbuck, and I will find him and bring him back here—and Idayah with him, or I will never return."

THE END.

The next NICK CARTER WEEKLY story, No. 536, will be the history of the detective's experiences in the strange country that has already been partly described. This one has been only the tale of Gerald Starbuck's adventures in Nick Carter's hands to it. The next will be Nick's own story of the place; its title: "The Empire of a Goddess; or, Nick Carter's Wonderful Adventures."

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How the Early Numbers of the TIP TOP WEEKLY May Be Secured

TO THE boys who take interest in the adventures of Frank Merriwell and want to read everything that was written about him, we desire to say that numbers 1 to 325 of the TIP TOP WEEKLY containing his early adventures are entirely out of stock and will not be reprinted. These numbers, however, were published in the Medal Library beginning with No. 150 which is entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays." We give herewith a complete list of all the Merriwell stories that have been published in book form up to the time of writing.

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